

**Your Mind on Media Newsletter “Ten Ways to Foster That Aha! Experience”
August 2011
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Do you struggle to come up with a new idea when drowning in a sea of information? Are you searching for a new product, or a research idea, or a marketing technique, or a story; are you looking for the solution to a problem, or simply trying to find a way to organize information into a memo or a report?

Where does that aha! moment come from? I just wrote [a blog for PsychologyToday.com](#), in which I talked about J.K. Rowling’s explanation of how she got that billion dollar idea—Harry Potter. As I argued in last month’s newsletter and blog, we really need to give ourselves more time to think if we want to ready our brains for making creative connections. But this month I’ve written about some neuroscientists who are looking inside the brains of people as they solve insight problems. These researchers note that just before the insights come, rather than focusing their attention outward at the problem to be solved, the problem solvers’ attention is directed inward, as if they were scanning their brains for ideas that until now have been only weakly related.

Great ideas often emerge not from the outside, but from the linking of two thoughts or memories that are already stored in your brain.

How can we improve the chances that two previously unrelated ideas will meet up to make that insight happen? Here are ten suggestions:

1. When you hit an impasse, choose a break of the low-information variety (avoid TV, the Internet, messaging); don’t just add more information.
2. Move to a different location to get a different perspective. Never eat lunch at your desk. If you don’t have time to get away, even switching desks with someone else will be better than staring at the same stuff you’ve been looking at all morning.
3. Talk to people about your ideas—especially people outside your area of expertise. Their naïve questions on your subject may stimulate you to think in new directions.
4. If you can’t actually talk to people about your problem, just visualize that conversation, imagining how you would explain your ideas to a specific person and how they might respond. You’ll be surprised what that imaginary conversation will yield.
5. Don’t schedule a day with nothing but work. Make sure there are fun, restorative breaks available to you when you need them.
6. Enjoy cognitive activities that promote thinking outside the box or looking at things from different perspectives. I enjoy crossword puzzles

- that include oddball definitions—using words in ways that are unexpected.
7. Read books and articles about how other creative people came up with their insights.
 8. Observe the people around you (in the REAL world) when you're out and about. What you see might be related to your problem in ways you'd never expect.
 9. Tolerate a touch of boredom, and let your mind wander.
 10. Always have a pencil and paper or digital recorder with you—to save those great ideas when they arrive unexpectedly.

Connecting to Audiences Online

I just returned from a speaking trip, where one of my activities was to give an educational presentation to more than 600 employees at a top U. S. manufacturing corporation. The talk was seen live around the country at more than 40 locations. It was the first time I had tried some of my interactive *brain exercises* in a distance-learning context, and I was pleased that the attendees participated as enthusiastically as my live audiences usually do. Hearing about the recent research on multitasking and information overload is nice, but there's nothing like experiencing these challenges first-hand to create that aha! experience in an audience. The fact that these people were responding on-line enabled them to provide me with moment-to-moment feedback on their responses. Even though I never met any of these people face-to-face, I felt that I really connected with them. One person said, "I think this course should be a mandatory part of our yearly training!!!"

Making These Ideas Work for You

The people in your business, association, or school may benefit from my keynote and workshop presentations about strategies to make the most of their time and their talents by managing the digital input in their lives. Email or call me to learn about how we can help them succeed and thrive in the Internet age. Or go to the Speaking section of my website to explore the various programs I can offer on increasing productivity, maximizing creativity, and reducing stress.

Wishing you rewards in your work and balance in your life,

Joanne Cantor, Ph.D.

PS—If you like this email, forward it to a friend or associate who you think might find it interesting or helpful!